

Public Comment Summary Report for the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness
Water Developments Preliminary EA

Below is a summary of the comments and issues that were received on the preliminary EA. The comments are grouped into resource categories.

Summary of Public Comments	BLM Response
<p><u>Wild Horses/Livestock</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wild Horses are currently impacting the riparian areas, bighorn sheep populations, and other wildlife species in the area. 2. AML for the wild horse population needs to be reduced. 3. Harmful affects from alternatives to wild horses needs to be analyzed. 4. Need an alternative to remove livestock from other portions of sheep habitat. 	<p><i>1. Impacts occurring to other resources from wild horses are fully analyzed in the EA using current wild horse population censuses and rangeland and riparian monitoring data.</i></p> <p><i>2. The High Rock HMA is scheduled to be gathered to the low range of AML in the summer/fall of 2006. Post gather monitoring of rangeland and riparian resources will be used to determine if adjusting the AML in the area is necessary.</i></p> <p><i>3. Potential impacts to wild horses from all proposed action and alternatives are included in the EA.</i></p> <p><i>4. Livestock grazing strategies for the Soldier Meadows allotment were developed through an evaluation process and implemented with a Multiple Use Decision for the allotment in 2003. No new information was developed in the process of this assessment that warranted additional alternatives dealing with livestock grazing. No livestock grazing is permitted in the portions of the Massacre Mountain Allotment where projects are proposed</i></p>
<p><u>Riparian Areas/ Rangeland Health</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Existing water sources and associated riparian habitats in the area are degraded and not all of the water sources were included in the EA. 6. Need to include a current rangeland health assessment. 	<p><i>5. Using current riparian inventories, impacts from the proposed action and alternatives were analyzed to existing water sources in the EA. NDOW identified five springs in their survey that they provided to BLM. One of these springs (Mustang Springs) was dropped from the EA because NDOW and BLM determined it was outside of bighorn habitat and was not an important water source for the sheep population. Another spring that is inaccessible to wild horses and receives no impact from horses or livestock was mentioned in the EA but no action was deemed necessary at the spring. The other 3 springs that NDOW identified are included in Alternative I and are proposed for exclosure construction. If other springs are identified that are not meeting land health standards appropriate management actions will be proposed. Monitoring of the 3 project springs as well as other springs in the High Rock area are included as part of the decision.</i></p> <p><i>6. A rangeland health assessment for the High Rock portion of the assessment has not been completed. The rangeland health assessment for the Soldier Meadows allotment was considered in the assessment process and more recent monitoring information was used in the assessment process.</i></p>

7. Need to include information on spring flows, water quality and impacts to springheads.	<i>7. There has been data on spring flows or water quality collected at any of the three springs. None of the alternatives would alter any springheads.</i>
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<p><u>Wildlife Water Development/Exclosure Alternatives</u></p> <p>8. The wildlife water developments are necessary to mitigate for degraded springs and will benefit all wildlife species.</p> <p>9. Wildlife water developments were previously approved in prior management plans.</p> <p>10. Need to re-assess the location and type of water developments and consider temporary water developments.</p> <p>11. There is concern over the potential impact of the exclosures on other wildlife (i.e. increased raptor perching)</p> <p>12. Proposed exclosures should be larger and include entire riparian area.</p> <p>13. The exclosures will not stand up to wild horses and livestock and will require expensive maintenance.</p>	<p><i>8. Impacts to existing springs and wildlife species are analyzed in the EA. Because the water developments were proposed to be constructed within the East Fork High Rock Canyon Wilderness they can only be authorized if they could be shown to be necessary to maintain the wilderness character of the area. The EA determined that Alternative I would mitigate impacts occurring to existing springs and would have less of an impact to the wilderness character of the area. The decision provides for future consideration of the wildlife waters following a 3 year evaluation of the bighorn sheep populations, spring conditions and wild horse populations.</i></p> <p><i>9. The wildlife water developments were originally recommended by a Technical Review Team in 1982 for various reasons and were then carried forward in the Habitat Management Plan and ACEC plan for the area. None of these documents authorized the proposal or conducted a site specific project level analysis of the developments. With the designation of the area as wilderness the proposal must now be consistent with the Wilderness Act.</i></p> <p><i>10. The water developments were proposed by NDOW and their designs, locations and mitigation actions are included in the EA. The primary concern with construction of the water developments is not their location or type it is that they are considered structures which are prohibited by Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act, unless they can be shown to be the minimum required action to maintain wilderness values of the area.</i></p> <p><i>11. Potential impacts of constructing the exclosures are included in the EA.</i></p> <p><i>12. The exclosure alternative has been modified to increase the amount of riparian areas within the fences.</i></p> <p><i>13. The exclosures will be built from steel pipe or wooden buck and pole designs shown to resist large ungulate pressure and decrease maintenance needs.</i></p>
<p><u>Law/NEPA</u></p> <p>14. Preliminary EA ignores the Wilderness Act, enabling legislation, the Technical Amendment, the NCA RMP and ignores the rights of the State to manage wildlife.</p>	<p><i>14. The relationship of the proposed actions and alternatives to the Wilderness Act, enabling legislation and Technical Amendment are discussed in the EA. The EA also discusses the relationship between BLM management of habitat and State management of wildlife.</i></p>

15. The Wilderness Recommendations/EIS of the Eagle Lake Cedarville Study Area fully assessed the construction of the two water developments and the EA contradicts the findings of the EIS.	<i>15. The Wilderness Recommendations EIS was prepared to analyze the impacts of BLM's suitability recommendations of WSAs for wilderness designation and how those recommendations would impact wilderness values. The EIS also analyzed impacts of potential management actions and their impacts to wilderness characteristics. The EIS did find that the water developments would have impacts to the naturalness of the area. Now that the area has been designated as wilderness the BLM is required to evaluate proposals and ensure that they are the minimum required action for management of the wilderness character.</i>
<u>Recreation</u>	
16. Increased recreational use and vehicle traffic in the NCA is impacting wildlife.	<i>16. Impacts from recreation on wildlife are analyzed in the EA. Recreation use data for the project area (High Rock Canyon) does not reflect use levels that would deter sheep from accessing water within most of the High Rock area. The monitoring actions included in the decision provided for continued monitoring of recreational impacts on wildlife populations in the High Rock area.</i>
17. EA states that restrictions on recreation use are expected to alleviate the potential for human caused stress to wildlife. This conclusion is incorrect.	<i>17. The EA states that "impacts related to these actions are yet unknown but they are expected to alleviate potential human caused stress to bighorn and other wildlife species in the canyon".</i>
<u>Wildlife</u>	
18. Bighorn sheep are not able to achieve their natural numbers or distribution due to human caused impacts (such as degraded springs from wild horses) and year round water sources area necessary to re-establish a viable herd.	<i>18. The EA used the information provided by NDOW and available information in the literature to evaluate this question. BLM feels that the best approach at this time is to improve the condition of damaged and at risk spring systems. The decision provides for a 3 year evaluation of the projects, bighorn sheep population trends and wild horse management.</i>
19. The bighorn population does not seem to be being impacted to the degree that would require constructing water developments.	<i>19. See response to Comment 18 above.</i>
20. The population census referenced in the EA is correct for the entire 012 unit, but BLM did not include the specific population analysis provided by NDOW on the status of the bighorn population within the project area.	<i>20. This information was included in the EA. See response to Comment 18 above.</i>
21. Discussion of escape terrain needs to identify the varying nature of bighorn use relative to the exposure and intensity to human disturbances.	<i>21. The model developed for this analysis was general in nature and represents an overview of likely bighorn habitat value in Unit 012. It was not intended to identify all the variables of bighorn habitat use in the assessment area.</i>
22. Need to analyze impacts to other wildlife species from the alternatives.	<i>22. A number of other representative and selected indicator species were included in the analysis.</i>
<u>Wilderness</u>	
23. The Wilderness Act allows for the construction of water developments.	<i>23. As outlined in Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act any structure or installation can only be constructed within a wilderness area unless it is shown to be the minimum</i>

	<p><i>necessary action for maintaining the wilderness character of the area, including emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area.. The EA determined that constructing exclosures on existing springs (one within wilderness) are necessary to maintain the wilderness character of the area and would have less of an impact on the wilderness values of the area than the construction of water developments .Details can be found in Appendix B of the EA.</i></p>
<p>24. Structures and installations are prohibited by the Wilderness Act.</p>	<p><i>24. See response to Comment 23 above.</i></p>
<p>25. EA fails to disclose the positive impacts on wilderness by enhancing wildlife as a wilderness value.</p>	<p><i>25. Native, naturally distributed wildlife populations are an essential characteristic of wilderness and will be treated as such in the EA.</i></p>
<p><u>Visual Resource Management</u></p>	
<p>26. Impacts will occur from both the water developments and exclosures to VRM.</p>	<p><i>26. Impacts to VRM values from the proposed action and alternatives are discussed in the EA</i></p>
<p>27. Mitigation is needed to screen the projects.</p>	<p><i>27.. Mitigation is included in the EA for all developments</i></p>